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ABSTRACT

The Internet is a resource that allows English as a Second Language (ESL) students to communicate meaningfully in English. One way to combine the Internet with teaching English is to give students a group or individual assignment to make their own Web pages. As they complete these assignments, they can develop skills in searching out resources on the Internet, gathering information, reading in English, selecting and classifying information, writing in English, organizing information, describing resources, presenting information in an appropriate manner, audience analysis, communicating with other group members, and writing HTML. One Japanese university has organized cultural Web page projects for ESL students. This paper describes the advantages and disadvantages of such assignments. Advantages include using English to communicate and learning to present and organize information effectively. Disadvantages include difficulty due to lack of experience with the Web and difficulty finding useful Web resources. The paper also reviews several student Web projects and explains how to conduct such an assignment. It concludes by listing relevant Web pages. (SM)

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# Student-Constructed Web Pages for Intercultural Understanding

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## Introduction

Students in countries where English is a foreign language often do not have opportunities to use English for communication. The Internet is one resource that can allow students to communicate meaningfully in English. With greater access to computers both at school and at home, this teaching tool has become more widely available in recent years.

One way to combine the Internet with teaching English is to give students a group or individual assignment to make their own web pages. Students can make pages about a subject that they are interested in, a subject related to their major, hobby, or something they would like to learn about.

As students carry out these assignments, among the skills they can develop are searching resources on the Internet, gathering information, reading English, selecting information and classifying it, writing in English, organizing information, describing or explaining resources, presenting information in the way that readers can understand easily, audience analysis, communicating with other group members or readers using e-mail, and writing HTML. It is possible to include many different kinds of communication in English, so a web page project can generate a great many language activities in English, and students will both use and be exposed to English in the context of working on at task of interest to them.

We have organized cultural web page making projects for English language students, and they have enjoyed them as well as studying English by making web projects. In this paper, we will explain the advantages and disadvantages of such assignments. We will review some web projects that are already on the web and explain how this assignment can be done.

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Web Projects

Depending on the exact conditions of the assignment, web projects can have a variety of advantages and disadvantages.

### Advantages

Possibly the most important advantage of student-made web pages is that they make it possible for students to use English as a form of communication. In EFL settings, students mainly use English in class for the teacher to evaluate. They generally do not read in English

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beyond what they are assigned to read for a course. They do not often have an opportunity to read about subjects of their own choice or to use English as a form of communication. A web page assignment can involve doing research both on and off the Internet, writing material for the web pages, reading and answering responses to the web pages sent in by readers. These involve communicating in English in meaningful ways.

When making web pages that might be read by anyone, students need to be aware of their audience. They need to analyze what their audience may or may not know about the subject. For example, in making a web page explaining Japanese culture to non-Japanese, writers need to consider how to explain aspects of Japanese culture in English to a general reader who may have little or no knowledge of Japanese culture in a way that is understandable.

If it involves research, a web page assignment exposes students to available resources on the Internet, giving them an idea of what sorts of resources are available, and helps students learn how to use search engines and links pages effectively. Students need to gather resources, read them, and select and organize information, all in English.

Student-made web pages can be done on a wide variety of subjects, depending on the interests of the students and their level of proficiency. For English language students, subjects related to cultures of various countries and to enhancing international understanding are particularly appropriate. Students can do web pages with information about English-speaking countries, which will also help them learn about the cultures of English-speaking countries. They can also do web pages about Japan, in order to learn to explain Japanese culture to English speakers.

Through this project, students can experience communication in English, and they can learn how to present and organize information effectively. In the case of group projects, students can learn through the comments their piers make and cooperation with them.

**Disadvantages**

Students may vary in the amount of experience they have in the use of computers, e-mail, browsers, etc. Some students will have had little experience and will need a great deal of help. In addition, most students will not have had experience making HTML files. For some students, lack of these computer skills will make this project difficult. In addition to giving students help with computer skills, one possible solution is to form project groups with students who have both high and low computer skills.

Using search engines effectively is not easy, and students are likely to have difficulty finding useful web resources. They may need guidance from the teacher on using search engines and finding useful links pages or other web resources, if these are necessary for the assignment.

Writing descriptions or explanations for links or essays for their web pages in English may also be difficult for students. While it is probably not necessary for teachers to completely correct their students' English, teachers should try to choose topics that are within their students' ability to express themselves.

Students may not have had the experience of working on a project in which they choose a topic; gather resources; read about the topic; select, organize, and synthesize useful information; and present the final product effectively. The process may be difficult for students, and they may need help from the teacher at various stages.

Since this project involves extensive use of English and a variety of types of tasks, it is not an easy assignment. However, all aspects of the project except making HTML files helps develop skills that are necessary for university students. Making HTML files is useful for study and work, and making simple ones is not difficult if proper instruction and good examples are given.

## Review of Similar Projects

A number of teachers throughout the world have made use of web pages to display their students' projects. In this section, we will briefly discuss just a few of these. There are a variety of ways to evaluate such projects, but here we have commented on such aspects as the usefulness of the project as a resource; its organization; and interest for students doing the project and potential readers.

*Tom Robb's student projects*. Tom Robb of Kyoto Sangyo University has had his students do a number of web projects based on explaining Japanese culture (http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~trobb/). These are Famous Japanese Personages Project, Kyoto Restaurant Project, Japanese Recipes Project (in English and Japanese), Kyoto Liquor Story (in English and Japanese), Tips for Using Nisuswriter (Project), and The Sounds of Japan. Each of these have explanations of some aspect of Japan or Japanese culture, except for Tips for Using Nisuswriter (Project), which is related to a computer program. The Personages Project, the first and most extensive of the projects, has brief biographies of famous modern Japanese people, divided into categories according to their field. The Kyoto Restaurant Project has information about restaurants in Kyoto, with maps and illustrations. Each of the projects is well organized and provides a useful resource to readers outside the course. Students' e-mail addresses posted on many of the pages allow readers to respond.

*Dave Sperling's student project*. Dave Sperling of California State University of Northridge had students interview each other and write brief biographies for a composition course (http://www.csun.edu/ ~hcesl004/CSUN.html). While this allows students to see their work on the Internet, it is not a useful resource for other readers.

*Seiko Oguri's student projects*. Seiko Oguri of Chubu University has a student project called "Writing about Japan", where students write about different aspects of Japanese culture in the categories of "School," "Home," "Society," "Traditions," "Food," and "Seasons" (http://www-clc.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/ oguri/japan/write_jpn.html). In addition, Prof. Oguri has another project where students write about their intercultural experiences (http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/seiko/xculture94.html) in both English-speaking and Asian countries. Some of the essays are general, and some deal with specific issues such as inconveniences or surprises. The former is a potential resource for foreigners wishing to learn about Japan or Japanese interested in how Japanese culture can be described in English; the latter is useful for its descriptions of cultural differences from the viewpoint of Japanese students.

*Kazunori Nozawa's student projects*. Kazunori Nozawa of Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto has had students do web pages on the city of Toyohashi (while teaching at Toyohashi University of Technology) and "Famous Japanese Scientists and Engineers" and "Introduction to CALL" (http://www. ritsumei.ac.jp/ec/~nozawa/CALLclass-e.html). These allowed students to work on subjects close to their interests while providing good resources.

*Ruth Vilmi's student projects*. Ruth Vilmi of Helsinki University of Technology has a web page with students' essays about a variety of aspects of Finnish culture (http://www.ruthvilmi.net/hut/Project/ Culture/). There are also a few student web presentations which involved doing surveys of other classes. These are an interesting resource for any readers interested in Finnish culture, but it might be more useful if the topics were categorized.

*K. Harumi's student projects*. In terms of topic, the student web pages of K. Harumi of Nanzan University in Nagoya are the most challenging (http://www.ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp/~kharumi/fl/classidx.htm). They deal with such complex issues as abortion, nuclear testing, the rising sea level, and earthquakes. However, unfortunately, the essays are disorganized and difficult to follow, and the format is unclear.

*Kazue Tanaka's student projects*. Students of Kazue Tanaka of Tokuyama Women's College did a very interesting project on cross-cultural topics (http://www.tokujo.ac.jp/Tanaka/Kazue/kazue.html) by interviewing people in different cultures by e-mail and looking for Internet resources. While this project makes good use of the Internet and allows students to communicate with people of different cultures, unfortunately, the results, described on students' web pages, are only in Japanese. Having the students write in English would seem to be a better conclusion for the project, both making students' findings available to a wider audience and requiring the students to use more English.

*Lilliam Hurst's student projects*. One of the more unusual projects is by students of Lilliam Hurst of Collège Claparède in Geneva

(http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/exchange/projects/geneva1.html). This project, for a literature course, involved reading the play *A Streetcar named Desire* and writing letters. Students either wrote letters to the characters in the play, offering sympathy for their situations, giving advice, etc., or wrote letters that the characters themselves might have written. As a project for a literature course, this seems to be a useful way to help students understand the characters in a literary work. It is interesting to readers interested in that literary work to see the students' points of view.

**Procedures for the Project**

In this section, we will discuss the specific assignment that one of us has used, with some suggestions for adaptations and for carrying out the assignment. This assignment may be adapted, depending on the level and interests of the students and the purpose of the course.

Since this course was for students interested in going abroad for study, the topic of the assignment was study abroad. Students chose a university and made a web page with at least 50 links (with descriptions, classified in categories) to web pages that would be useful to a student at that university, including web pages related to the university, accommodations, the city, the country, etc. This topic is appropriate for students who may work or study abroad, or who are currently working or studying abroad. Students can also make web pages with information related to their own university for foreign students studying there. Another possibility is for students can also make web pages related to a particular country that they are interested in, with information about customs of that country, the history, the cities, etc. The content areas that students choose to work on depend on the students' interests and the topic of the course.

Since it is not easy to make HTML files, students are provided with a web page for instruction and samples. After students study how to make a web page, they can use a sample to start making their project web page. (Helpful URLs can be found in the section of this paper on web resources.) Students who wish to use advanced techniques to make web pages may do so, but this should not be part of the evaluation if this is a project for an English language class rather than a computer class.

While working on the project, students had to make progress each week, and some pages were reviewed in each class. Students were assigned to give comments on other students' web pages using e-mail in between classes, and these comments could be used to improve the web pages. By the end of the project every student had reviewed all other students' web pages at some stage and had given comments.

In the final class, presentations were made of all web pages. Advanced students made presentations in English, based on instructions students were given for oral presentation

lessons. All student projects are kept on line permanently, and students are satisfied to show their product world wide.

## Useful Web Pages

For teachers interested in having students do such an assignment, there are a variety of web pages that are helpful. These can be divided into three categories: help in writing web pages, search engines and search advice, and sites related to cultures. (Some pages fall into more than one category.) In addition, examples of pages made by students can be seen on the Internet. In this section we will discuss a few web sites in each category.

### Help with Writing Web Pages

There are a large number of web pages for those interested in learning how to write web pages. Although there are programs with which one can write web pages without knowing how to write the source code of web pages, it is often useful to know the basics. The following are links pages for pages on writing web pages or pages themselves, with comments.

**1. Using the Internet – Writing Web Pages**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/internet.htm#write

This page has links to a variety of helpful sites that are useful in writing web pages.

**2. Making Simple HTM Files**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/kitao/int-www.htm#adv

This page has explanations of how to write web pages and examples of features that you can use.

**3. A Beginners Guide to HTML**

http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/General/Internet/WWW/HTMLPrimer.html

This is an excellent, clear explanation of HTML. It includes a general introduction of what HTML is, what tags are, and how to use tags. It also has links to other useful sites.

**4. Learning English on the Net (LEON)**

http://home.att.ne.jp/gold/db/leon.html

This page has links to information about the Web especially for English language students.

**5. How to Make a Successful ESL/EFL Teacher's Web Page**

http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Articles/Kelly-MakePage/

This page includes good advice about making web pages. Among its useful features are "templates" (samples of basic web pages that can be adapted), advice on good web page "style," and advice about what not to do.

**6. Webcom HTML Guide**

http://www.webcom.com/~webcom/html/tutor/

This is a page with information about writing web pages, templates, etc.

**7. Yahoo! Geocities**

http://geocities.yahoo.com/home/

This is a page with help building a web page, where you can post your own page.

**8. Cut and Paste JavaScript**

http://www.infohiway.com/javascript/toc/

For those interested in adding more sophisticated features to their web page, this page has examples of code for javascript. It allows students to add such features as guestbooks in which they can get feedback on their pages, games, frames, and clocks.

Search Engines and Advice for Searching

Searching is a vital skill for users of the Internet—it is almost impossible to use the Internet without being able to search, and effective searching skills can save users hours. The following are links to search engine links pages and to advice about searching effectively.

**1. Reference Materials for Students and Researchers – Search Engines**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/referenc.htm#search

This page has links to search engines and to advice about searching.

**2. Net Search Pages**

http://home.netscape.com/escapes/search/ntsrchrnd-1.html

This page has links to search engines, divided into categories according to type and purpose.

**3. Search Engine Watch**

http://searchenginewatch.com/

This page has links to search engines, reviews of search engines, etc. It is useful for learning about different types of search engines, how they are different from one another, and so on.

**4. Search Techniques Seminar**

http://kevinryan.com/student/search/

This page is based on a seminar on searching the Internet, and has information about basic and advanced search techniques and links to resources.

**5. Backflip**

http://www.backflip.com/login.ihtml

This is a search engine that can be personalized and which includes "web tours" on different subjects.

Lists of Links to Sites Related to Cultures

As mentioned above, an appropriate topic for English students is culture and intercultural

understanding. There are many web sites where students can learn about other cultures or their own.

**1. Information on the US**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/us-info.htm

This page has links to a great many sites related to the US.

**2. Useful Resources, Lesson Plans, and Teaching Materials for Teachers – Cultures**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/teacher.htm#culture

This page has links to resources related to a variety of cultures.

**3. American Studies Web**

http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads/asw/

The page has extensive links to information on the United States.

**4. Culture Pages in English**

http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/8383/

This page is a class project with information related to a variety of cultures.

Examples of Student-Made Web Pages

The following are examples of web pages made by Kenji Kitao's students

**1. Kyoto: Ancient Capital of Japan**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/kyoto/

(Other student projects can be found at: http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/material/project/ and http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/.)

**2. To Study at SOAS**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/practicum/nishizawa.htm

**3. Welcome to San Diego!!!**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/meta/f/erika/

**4. Amherst College**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/practicum/kato.htm

**5. Travel Cheap in Japan -Transportation and Lodging - (Student Project)**

http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/meta00/odani.htm

The following are some other student web projects:

**6. Tom Robb's student projects (Kyoto Sangyo University)**

http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~trobb/index.html

**7. Dave Sperling's student project (California State University of Northridge)**

http://www.csun.edu/~hcesl004/CSUN.html

**8. Seiko Oguri's student projects (Chubu University)**

http://www-clc.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/oguri/japan/write_jpn.html

http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/seiko/xculture94.html

**9. Kazunori Nozawa's student projects (Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto)**

http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/ec/~nozawa/CALLclass-e.html

**10. Ruth Vilmi's student projects (Helsinki University of Technology)**

http://www.ruthvilmi.net/hut/Project/Culture/

**11. K. Harumi's student projects (Nanzan University in Nagoya)**

http://www.ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp/~kharumi/fl/classidx.htm

**12. Kazue Tanaka's student projects (Tokuyama Women's College)**

http://www.tokujo.ac.jp/Tanaka/Kazue/kazue.html

**13. Lilliam Hurst's student projects (Collège Claparède in Geneva)**

http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/exchange/projects/geneva1.html

(The handout for the original poster session, with most of the above links, can be found at http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.up/users/kkitao/library/handout/FLEATIV.htm.)

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